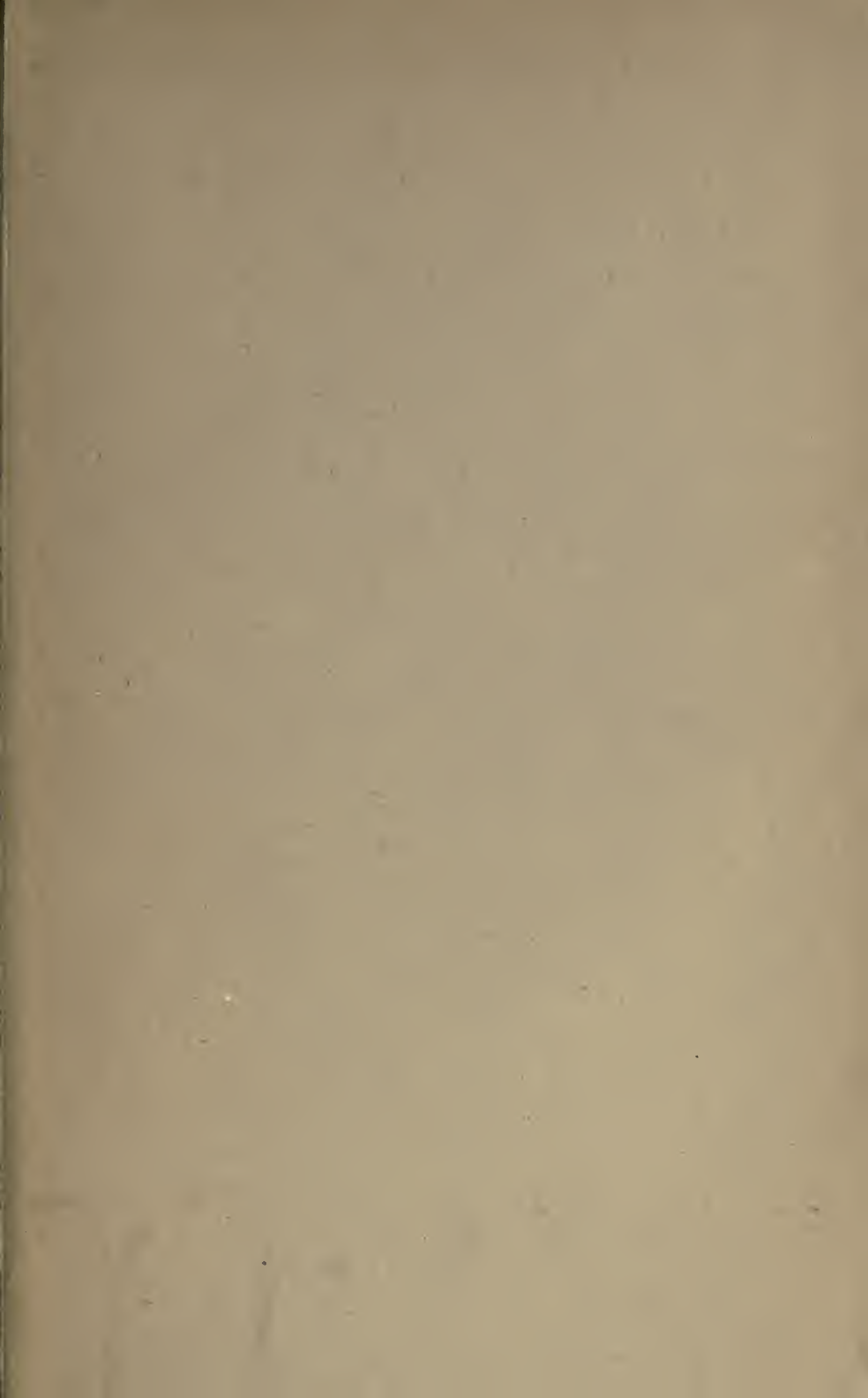


GASQUET

ABBOT FECKENHAM
AND BATH



HECCE.E.B
F!

ABBOT FECKENHAM AND BATH

By

THE RIGHT REV. F. A. ABBOT GASQUET, D.D., O.S.B

Reprinted from THE DOWNSIDE REVIEW
Christmas, 1906

PRICE ONE SHILLING

0.0050
15 7/8

9197

ABBOT FECKENHAM AND BATH¹

BATH, perhaps more than most other cities, has always been pleased to recognise and do honour to its worthies. To me, the very streets of the city appear to be peopled by the ghosts of bygone generations. If I shut my eyes upon electric tramways and such like evidences of what is called 'modern civilisation,' the beaux and belles of ancient days seem to come trooping from their hiding places and appear tripping along the streets as of old; the footways are at once all alive with the gentry of the cocked hat and full bottomed wig period, with their knee breeches and small clothes to match. Ladies, too, are there, with their hooped and tucked dresses, their high-heeled shoes, and those wonderful creations of the wigmaker's art upon their heads; whilst sedan chairs of all sorts and kinds are borne quickly along the roadways, now desecrated by every kind of modern conveyance.

9668
1576

It was in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, of course, that the city rose to the zenith of its renown, and the crowd of notabilities who then came to seek for rest, health and pleasure in this queen of watering-places, has served to make Bath almost a synonym for a city of gaiety, diversion and life. Indeed the memories of that period of prosperity and glory almost seem to have obliterated the thought of persons and of incidents of earlier days. It is one such person that I would recall to your memory to-night. When honoured, by the request of your President,

¹ A paper read before the members of the Literary and Scientific Institution, Bath, December 14, 1906.

to read a paper before this learned Society, my thoughts almost immediately turned to Abbot Feckenham, of Westminster, who is one of the personages my imagination has often conjured up whilst passing along the streets of this city. Most of those who listen to me probably know very little of this grave and kindly ecclesiastic, but the name. But in the sixteenth century, he was a generous and true benefactor to the poor of this place, and that at a time when he was himself suffering grievous trials for conscience sake. At the outset I should like to disclaim any pretence of originality in my presentment of the facts of Abbot Feckenham's life. I have merely taken what I find set down by others and chiefly by the Revd. E. Taunton in his history of the English *Black Monks*. He has been at great pains to collect every scrap of information in regard to the last Abbot of Westminster and I borrow freely from the result of his labours.

Feckenham's real name was Howman, his father and mother being Humphrey and Florence Howman of the village of Feckenham, in the county of Worcester. They appear to have been of the yeoman class, and to have been endowed with a certain amount of worldly wealth : at any rate they seem to have sent their son John, who was born somewhere about the first decade of the sixteenth century, to be trained in the monastery of Evesham, which was near their home. Here, the boy, who had probably received an elementary education from the parish priest of his native village, would have been taught in the claustral school of the great abbey. In time he joined the community as a novice, and in accordance with the very general custom of those days, became afterwards known by the name of his birthplace, as John Feckenham.

From Evesham the young monk proceeded to Oxford

to study at "Monk's College," or Gloucester Hall, now known as Worcester College. It is not important here to determine the actual date when he commenced his studies at Oxford; probably he went to college about 1530, when we are told definitely that he was eighteen years of age. His Prior at the house at Oxford was a monk of his own abbey of Evesham, named Robert Joseph, and an accidental survival of a manuscript letter-book gives us not only the information that it was this religious who taught the classics, but shows in some way at least how a professor lectured to his students in those bygone days. The MS. in question is a collection of Latin letters and addresses, made by this Prior Robert Joseph. It was, as you are all aware, the fashion in those times for scholars to send Latin epistles to their friends, and then to collect them into a volume. We have many printed books of Latin epistles of this kind. Prior Joseph, though his elegant letters were never destined to see the light in all the glory of a printed dress, still made his collection, which somehow or other got bound up with a Welsh MS.,—one of the Peniarth MSS.—and so was preserved to tell us something more than we knew before about the work of a professor at Gloucester Hall, when the monks were students there. Amongst other interesting items of information afforded in this MS. we have Prior Robert Joseph's inaugural lecture on a play of Terence; and, by the way, very practical and good it is. There is also another lecture of a different character, which was carefully prepared for delivery to the young Benedictine students at Gloucester Hall. It seems that one of the monks had been "pulling his old professor's leg," as we should say, by telling him that many of them thought that as a teacher he was getting a little past his prime, and that it might perhaps be a good thing if

he were to give place to a younger man more in touch with modern scholarship. Prior Robert was deeply wounded, and his carefully prepared address upbraids his pupils for their ingratitude, and practically calls upon those amongst them who considered that he ought to retire, to come forward boldly and say so: an invitation which it is hardly likely was accepted. At any rate, the old professor certainly continued to occupy his chair for some time longer.

In special regard to the young monk, John Feckenham, this same collection of letters is of some interest, since it contains a Latin epistle addressed to him on the occasion of his ordination to the priesthood. "It is a dignity," the writer says in the course of a long letter, "which in our days can never be despised or held in little regard. . . . From this time forth your very carriage and countenance must be changed; from this time forth you are to live after a fashion different to what you did before.

"Now have to be given up the things of youth and the ways of a child, for now you take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." This would have been written probably about the year 1536, and in the following year Feckenham was certainly at Oxford. "I find him," writes Anthony à Wood, "there in 1537, in which year he subscribed, by the name of John Feckenham, to a certain composition then made between Robert Joseph, prior of the said college (the writer of the Latin letters), and twenty-nine students thereof on one part (of which number Feckenham was one of the senior) and three of the senior beadles of the university on the other."

In 1538 Feckenham supplicated for his degree as Bachelor of Divinity and took it on 11th June, 1539. Previously he had, in all probability, been for some time

teaching in the abbey school at Evesham, as he had himself been taught, and he was there on 27th January, 1540, when the monastery was surrendered to Henry VIII. In the pension list his name appears as receiving 15 marks (£10) in place of the usual pension (10 marks) for the younger monks; probably because of his university degree. After the dissolution of his religious home, John Feckenham at first gravitated back to his old college at Oxford to continue his studies; he was soon, however, induced to become chaplain to Bishop Bell of Worcester. This office he held until the resignation of that prelate in 1543, when he joined Bishop Edmund Bonner in London, remaining with him until that prelate was committed as a prisoner to the Tower of London in 1549, for his opposition to many religious changes during the reign of Edward VI. At this time Feckenham, whilst still in London, received the living of Solihull in Warwickshire. During the time of his rectorship his parents—Humphrey and Florence Howman—left a bequest of 40s. to the poor, and among the records of the parish is said to be an old vellum book “containing the charitable alms given by way of love to the parishioners of Solihull, with the order of distribution thereof, begun by Master John Howman *alias* Fecknam, priest and doctor of divinity—in the year of our Lord 1548.”

Though moderate and gentle in his disposition, and ever considerate in his dealings with the convictions of others, Feckenham was strong in his own religious views and uncompromising in his attitude to religious change. He consequently quickly found himself involved in an atmosphere of controversy, and at this time probably developed those oratorical powers for which he afterwards became really famous. It was not long, however, before he found himself a prisoner in the

Tower, out of which he was, to use his own expression, "borrowed" frequently, for the purpose of sustaining the "ancient side" in the semi-public religious controversies, which were then in much favour with all parties. The first of these disputes was held at the Savoy, in the house of the Earl of Bedford; the second was at Sir William Cecil's at Westminster, and the third in the house of Sir John Cheke, the great Greek scholar and King Edward VI.'s tutor.

Although held all this time as a prisoner, Feckenham was somehow or other still possessed of his benefice at Solihull, of which, for some reason or other, he had not been deprived. He was consequently taken down from London and opposed to the bishop of his own diocese, Bishop Hooper, in four several disputations; the first was arranged at Pershore whilst the bishop was on his visitation tour, and the last in Worcester Cathedral, where amongst others who spoke against him was John Jewel, afterwards bishop of Salisbury.

With Mary Tudor's advent to the throne Feckenham of course obtained his liberty. On Tuesday, 5th September, 1553, he left the Tower, and according to Machyn's *Diary*, on Sunday the 24th of the same month "master doctor Fecknam did preach at Paul's Cross, the Sunday afore the Queen's coronation." He again became chaplain to Bishop Bonner, now also set at liberty, and was nominated a prebendary of St. Paul's in 1554. Other preferment came to him very rapidly: Queen Mary made him one of her chaplains and her confessor, and before November 25th, 1554, he was appointed Dean of St. Paul's. Fuller, the historian, says of him at this time: "He was very gracious with the Queen and effectually laid out all his interest with her (sometimes even to offend her, but never to injure her) to procure pardon of the faults, or mitigation of the

punishment of poor Protestants. The Earls of Bedford and Leicester received great kindness from him; and his old friend, Sir John Cheke, owed his life to Fecknam's personal interest with the Queen. He took up the cause of the unfortunate Lady Jane Dudley, and remonstrated with the Queen and Gardiner upon the policy of putting her to death. He visited the poor girl in prison; and though unsuccessful in removing the prejudices of her early education, he was able to help her to accept with resignation the fate that awaited her. Neither did he forsake the hapless lady until she paid by death the penalty of her father-in-law's treason and her own share therein. When the Princess Elizabeth was sent to the Tower, in March 1554, for her supposed part in Wyatt's rebellion, Fecknam, just then elected dean, interceded so earnestly for her release that Mary, who was convinced of her sister's guilt, or at any rate of her insincerity, showed for some time her displeasure with him. But Elizabeth's life was spared; and she was released, mainly by his importunity, after two months' imprisonment."

On 19th March, 1556, Giovanni Michiel, the Venetian ambassador, wrote from London to the Doge about the restoration of the Benedictines. He says: "Sixteen monks have also resumed the habit and returned to the Order spontaneously, although they were able to live and had lived out of it much at ease and liberty, there being included among them the Dean of St. Paul's (Feckenham) who has a wealthy revenue of well nigh 2000 (£); notwithstanding which they have renounced all their temporal possessions and conveniences and press for readmission into one of their monasteries." There were obvious difficulties in the way of any large scheme of monastic restoration: the property of the old abbeys had long since been granted away mostly to

laymen, and at some of the greater houses, like Westminster and Gloucester, chapters of secular priests had been established in place of the dispossessed monks. At Westminster however, arrangements were quickly made with the view of restoring the Benedictines to their old home: promotion was given to the dean and the interests of the other secular canons were secured, and on 7th September, 1556, the Queen appointed Feckenham abbot of restored Westminster. The Venetian ambassador says that the monks with their new abbot were to make their entry at the close of September, but this they did not do: there was evidently much more preparation necessary than had been calculated upon. Dean Stanley, in his *Historical Memorials of Westminster Abbey*, says "the great refectory was pulled down" and "the smaller dormitory was cleared away" and other conventual buildings had either been destroyed or adapted to other uses. So there was obviously much to be done before the new community could take up the old life again, and it was not until 21st November that the monks were able to begin once again the regular round of conventual duties in the cloisters and choir of Westminster.

I cannot resist quoting here the account given by the contemporary writer Machyn, in his quaint style, of this restoration. "The same day (21st November) was the new abbot of Westminster put in, Doctor Fecknam, late dean of Paul's, and xiv. more monks sworn in. And the morrow after, the lord abbot with his convent went a procession after the old fashion, in their monk's weeds, in cowls of black saye, with his vergers carrying his silver-rod in their hands; at Evensong time the vergers went through the cloisters to the abbot and so went into the church afore the high altar and there my lord kneeled down and his convent; and after his prayer

was made he was brought into the choir with the vergers and so into his place, and presently he began Evensong xxii. day of the same month that was St. Clement's Even last." "On the 29th day was the abbot stalled and did wear a mitre. The Lord Cardinal was there and many bishops and the lord treasurer and a great company. The Lord Chancellor (Bishop Gardiner) sang Mass and the abbot made the sermon."

Feckenham lost no time in setting his house in order and in gathering round him other monks and novices. Giovanni Michiel, the ambassador before referred to, tells us that on St. Thomas' Eve (December 20th) the Queen "chose to see the Benedictine monks in their habits at Westminster" and so going for Vespers was received by the abbot and twenty-eight other monks all men of mature age, the youngest being upwards of forty and all endowed with learning and piety, as proved by their renunciation of the many conveniences of life."

The restoration of Benedictine life at Westminster was not destined by Providence to continue for very long. Queen Mary died 17th November, 1558, and her funeral rites were solemnised at Westminster. Feckenham preached one sermon at the obsequies, and White, Bishop of Winchester, the other. Both gave umbrage to the new Queen, and the bishop's led to his confinement in his own house. As for Feckenham: it is said that Elizabeth greatly desired to win over to her side one whom she respected, and who was universally popular. One story has it that she offered him the Archbishopric of Canterbury if he would assist in the settlement of the national religion on the lines she desired. The abbot, however, remained staunch to his conscientious convictions, and in Parliament strenuously opposed all the measures by which the

religious settlement was finally effected. During the time of the debates in the Parliament, Feckenham was quietly awaiting at Westminster the approaching ruin of his house, which to him at least could hardly be doubtful. He went on in all things, as if no storm clouds were gathering, leading his monastic life with his brethren. The story goes that he was engaged in planting some elms in his garden at Westminster when a message was brought to him that a majority of the House of Commons had voted the destruction of all religious houses, and the messenger remarked that as he and his monks would soon have to go, he was planting his trees in vain. "Not in vain," replied the abbot. "Those that come after me may perhaps be scholars and lovers of retirement, and whilst walking under the shade of these trees they may sometimes think of the olden religion of England and of the last abbot of this place," and so he went on planting.

The end of monastic Westminster came on 12th July, 1559. On that date, for refusing the Oath of Supremacy, Feckenham and his monks were turned out of their house. What immediately became of them we do not know and probably never shall, but judging from the case of the bishops we may suppose that they were probably assigned places of abode. It was, however, soon considered injurious to the new order, that the bishops of the old order and Abbot Feckenham should be allowed even the semblance of liberty comprised in the order for a fixed place of abode, from which they could not depart without permission. So on May 20th, 1560, it was agreed in the Queen's Council that Feckenham and some of the bishops should be confined straightway in prison, and so by order of Archbishop Parker "at night about 8 of the clock was sent to the

Fleet doctor Scory, and Master Feckenham to the Tower."

In this confinement the abbot remained until 1563. In the March of that year Parliament had given authority to the new bishops to administer the Oath of Supremacy, with the new penalty of death for those who refused it. The plague was at that time raging in the city of London, and the prisoners petitioned "to be removed to some other convenient place for their better safeguard from the present infection." This was so far granted that they were committed to the charge of the bishops. Stowe, the careful historian, thus relates the fact: "anno 1563 in September the old bishops and divers doctors, (were sent to the bishop's houses) there to remain prisoners under their custody (the plague being then in the city was thought the cause.)"

Feckenham was brought, first of all, back to his old home at Westminster to the care of the new dean, Goodman. But before the winter, at the suggestion of Bishop Grindal, he was removed to the house of Bishop Horne, of Winchester. In spite of all he could do and say and notwithstanding all his arguments, the Bishop of Winchester was unable to shake the resolution of the abbot and prevail on him to take the Oath of Supremacy. Horne indeed complains that Feckenham, at the end of all discussion, used to declare that it was with him a mere matter of conscience; and, pointing to his heart, would say: "The matter itself is founded here, and shall never go out." And so in the end, Horne gave up the task of trying to change his prisoner's opinion; and by January, 1565, Feckenham was back once more in the Tower. From that time until 17th of July, 1574, he remained either there or in the Marshalsea, in more or less strict confinement.

After fourteen years' confinement he was permitted to go out on conditions. He was bound not to try and gain others to his way of thinking; he was to dwell in a specified place, "was not to depart from thence at any time, without the licence of the lords of the Council," and he was not to receive any visitors. As a prisoner on parole, then, Feckenham came in July, 1574, to live in Holborn; whereabouts, it is not exactly known. No sooner had he gained his liberty, even with restrictions, than the abbot's old passion of doing good to others reasserted itself, and he at once became engaged in works of true charity and general usefulness. "Benevolence was so marked a feature in his character that," as Fuller says, "he relieved the poor wheresoever he came; so that flies flock not thicker about spilt honey than the beggars constantly crowded about him."

We have unfortunately no information about the source of the money, which he evidently had at his disposal. But clearly considerable sums must have been given to him for charitable purposes, as, no doubt, the donors were assured that they would be well and faithfully expended by him. Whilst dwelling in Holborn, Feckenham consequently was able to build an aqueduct for the use of the people generally. Every day he is said to have distributed the milk of twelve cows among the sick and poor of the district, and took under his special charge the widows and orphans. He encouraged the youth of the neighbourhood in many sports, by giving prizes and by arranging Sunday games, such as all English lads love.

And now comes the connection of Abbot Feckenham with this city of Bath. Whilst labouring for the good of others in London his constitution, naturally enfeebled by his long imprisonment, gave way, and he became seriously ill. On July 18th, 1575, the

Council in reply to his petition, ordered "the Master of the Rolls, or in his absence the Recorder of London, to take bondes of Doctor Feckenham for his good behaviour and that at Michaelmas next he shall return to the place where he presently is, and in the meantime he may repair to the Baths." "*The baths*," of course—at any rate in those days—meant this city, which had been pre-eminently the health resort of Englishmen for centuries.

Hither then, some time in the summer of 1575, came Abbot Feckenham, with leave to remain until the feast of Michaelmas. He, however, certainly remained longer than that, as we shall see, as it was the common practice at this time to extend such permissions. Whilst here the abbot was the guest of a then well-known physician of the city, Dr. Ruben Sherwood, who, although a recognised "popish recusant," had probably, like so many other doctors, been allowed to remain unmolested because of his skill, and the paucity of such men of talent in medicine in the sixteenth century. I may perhaps, here, be allowed a brief digression to point out to you, from an interesting article in *The Downside Review* called "A seventeenth century West Country Jaunt," by Father N. Birt, that this Dr. Ruben Sherwood died in 1599, and that in the seventeenth century there was certainly a Sherwood tomb and brass in the Abbey, with the arms of the family and a latin inscription; this has of course since disappeared.

It is not improbable that Dr. Ruben Sherwood, at the time of Abbot Feckenham's visit, occupied a long building, parallel to the west end of the abbey church on the south side, which existed till 1755. This had probably been the Prior's quarters and was subsequently known as Abbey House. Collinson says that the house was again rendered habitable some time after

the dissolution, and that parts of it, "obsolete offices and obscure rooms and lofts," were left in their former state and had never been occupied after their desertion by the monks. The historian of Somerset also speaks of a find of old vestments and other ecclesiastical garments in a walled-up apartment in this old house in 1755; but unfortunately the things fell to dust and we have no description of them. It strikes me, however, as more than possible that they were vestments for the use of priests, who were compelled to hide away during penal times. Be that as it may, it would appear more than likely that Dr. Ruben Sherwood lived in these old quarters and that it was here that he received Abbot Feckenham when he came to take the waters in 1575. Certainly his son, John Sherwood, also a physician and a "recusant," had a lease of the house and premises till his death in 1620, and used to receive patients who came for the Bath waters.

During his stay at this renowned watering-place, Abbot Feckenham was not wholly occupied with the cure of his own ills. It seemed impossible for him not to think of others, and here in this city he felt himself moved with compassion to see how the poor, deprived of their charitable foundations during the religious upheaval, were excluded from the use and benefit of the medicinal waters. He therefore built then, with his own means, a small bath and hospital. In his *Description of Bath*, written nearly two centuries after, a writer thus speaks of it: "The lepers' hospital is a building of 8ft. 6in. in front towards the East on the ground floor, 14ft. in front above and 13ft. in depth, but yet it is furnished with seven beds for the most miserable of objects, who fly to Bath for relief from the hot waters. This hovel stands at the corner of Nowhere Lane, and is so near the lepers' bath that the

poor are under little or no difficulty in stepping from one place to the other."

A slight record of the abbot's work in this matter is found in the accounts of the City Chamberlain for 1576: "Delyvered to Mr. Fekewand, late abbot of Westminster, three tonnes of Tymber and x foote to builde the howse for the poore by the whote bath, xxxiiis. iiid. To hym more iiic of lathes at xd the c, iiis. 4d." Feckenham placed his little foundation under the direction of the hospital of St. Mary Magdalene, and it seems that in 1804, when the Corporation pulled down "the hovel," £200 was paid to the hospital in Holloway in compensation. The old bath itself was utilised by Wood as an underground tank when he built the Royal Baths.

Besides this practical act of charity to the poor of Bath, Abbot Feckenham drew up a book of receipts and directions to help those who could not afford a physician to recover their health. This MS. is now in the British Museum, and at the beginning of the volume the reader is told that, "This book of Sovereign medicines against the most common and known diseases both of men and women was by good prooffe and long experience collected of Mr. Doctor Fecknam, late Abbot of Westminster, and that chiefly for the poore, which hath not at alle tymes the learned phisitions at hand."

In these days a collection of simple remedies such as those here brought together, is, of course, of small value or interest. Many of these remedies are old family receipts and are said to be taken "from my cosen's D. H.'s book"—or from "Mistress H's"—no doubt one of the family of Howman. But what is of interest in this regard, is a set of rules drawn up by the Abbot for those who would profit by taking or bathing in the Bath waters.

PRESCRIPTIONS AND RULES TO BE OBSERVED AT THE BATHE.

When you com to Bathe after your joyrnneing rest and quiet your bodie for the space of a daie or two and se the faccion of the Bathe how and after what sort others that are there do use the same.

If it be not a faire cleare daie to, go not into the open bathe, but rather use the water in a bathing vessel in yor own chamber as many men doe.

The best time in the daie to go into the bathes is in the morning an houre or half an houre after the sunne rising, or there about, in the most quiet time. And when you shall feel your stomache well and quiet and that your meet is well digested and have rested well the night before. But before you goe into this bath you must walke an houre at the leaste in your chamber or else where.

You must go into your Bath with an emptie stomake and so to remayne as long as you are in it except great necessitie require the contrarie. And then to take some little supping is not hurtefull. Let your tarrying be in the Bathe accordinge as you may well abide it, but tarry not so long in any wyse at the fyrst allthough you may well abyde it that yor strength att no tyme may fayl you.

You may tarry in the crosse bathe an houre and a halfe att a tyme after the firste bathinge. And in the Kynges Bathe you may tarry after the first batheinges at one time half an houre or 3 quarters of an houre. But in any wyse tarry at no time untill you be faynt, or that yor strength fayld you.

And yf at any time you be faynt in the bath then you may drynke some ale warmed with a taste or any other suppinge, or green ginger, or yf need be aqua composita methेरidate the bignes of a nut kernell at a time either by itself or mixed with ale or other liquor.

As longe as you are in any of the Bathes you must cover your head very well that you take no colde thereof, for it is very perillous to take any cold one your head in the bathe or in any other place during your bathinge tyme.

When you forth of any of the Bathes se that you cover your head very well and dry of the water of your bodie with warme clothes and then put on a warm shert and a mantle or some warm gowns for taking of cold and so go straight way to warmed bed and sweat ther yf you can and wpe off the sweat diligently and after that you

may sleepe a whyle, but you must not drynke anything until dinner tyme, except you be very faint and then you may take a little sugar candie or a few rasons or a little thin broath but small quantitie to slake your thirste onlie, because it is not good to eat or drynke by or by after the bathe untill you have slept a little yf you can.

After that you have sweat and slept enough and be clearly delivered fro the heat that you had in the bathe and in your bedd then you may ryse and walk a lytle and so go to your dynner, for by mesureable walking the evill vapors and wyndines of the stomache that are take in the Bathe be driven away and utterlie voyded.

After all this then go to your dynner and eate of good meat but not very much that you may ryse fro the table with some appetite so that you could eat more yf you wolde and yet you must not eat too little for decaying of your strength.

Let your bread bee of good sweet wheate and of one dayes bakeinge or ii at the most and your meat well boyled or roasted. And specially let these be your meates, mutton, veale, chicken, rabbet, capon, fesaunt, Patrigh or the like.

You may eat also fresh water fish, so it be not muddie as eles and the like, refraining all salt fish as lyng, haberdyne, &c. Avoyd all frutes and rare herbes, salletts and the lyke.

Apparell your bodie accordinge to the coldness of the wether and the temperature of the eyre, but in any wyse take no cold.

And yf you bathe agayne in the after noone or att after Dinner then take a very lyght dinner as a cople of potched eggs, a caudell or some thine broath with a chicken and then 4 or 5 hours after your dynner so taken you may bathe agayne and in any wyse tarrie not so longe in the bathe as you did in the fore noone.

It is apparently impossible to determine certainly how long Abbot Feckenham remained at Bath—probably it was until the spring of 1576. In the middle of 1577 he was certainly back in London, for Aylmer, Bishop of London, in June of that year, had complained of the influence of those he called “active popish dignitaries,” amongst whom he names the abbot, and begs that they may be again placed in the custody of some of the bishops. In consequence of this representation, Walsingham wrote to some of their lordships to ask their

advice as to "what is meetest to be done with Watson, Feckenham, Harpefield and others of that ring that are thought to be leaders and pillars of the consciences of great numbers of such as be carried with the errors."

As a result of the episcopal advice, Cox, the bishop of Ely, in July 1577, was directed to receive Abbot Feckenham into his house, and a stringent code of regulations was drawn up for the treatment of the aged abbot. Dr. Cox did his best to convert his prisoner to his own religious views, but without success, and in August 1578 was fain to write to Burghley that his efforts had failed and that Feckenham "was a gentle person, but in popish religion too, too obdurate." Nothing was done at that time, and the abbot remained on until 1580, when in June Bishop Cox wrote to say that he could put up with him no longer; so in July, 1580, the late abbot of Westminster was once more moved, this time to Wisbeach Castle, the disused and indeed partly ruinous dwelling place of the bishops of Ely.

Wisbeach was not a cheerful abode. It has been well described in the following words: "During the winter the sea mists drifting landwards almost always hung over and hid the castle walls. Broad pools and patches of stagnant waters, green with rank weeds, and wide marshes and sterile flats lay outspread all around for miles. The muddy river was constantly overflowing its broken-down banks, so that the moat of the castle constantly flooded the adjacent garden and orchard. Of foliage, save a few stunted willow trees, there was little or none in sight; for when summer came round the sun's heat soon parched up the rank grass in the courtyard, and without, the dandelion and snapdragon which grew upon its massive but dilapidated walls."

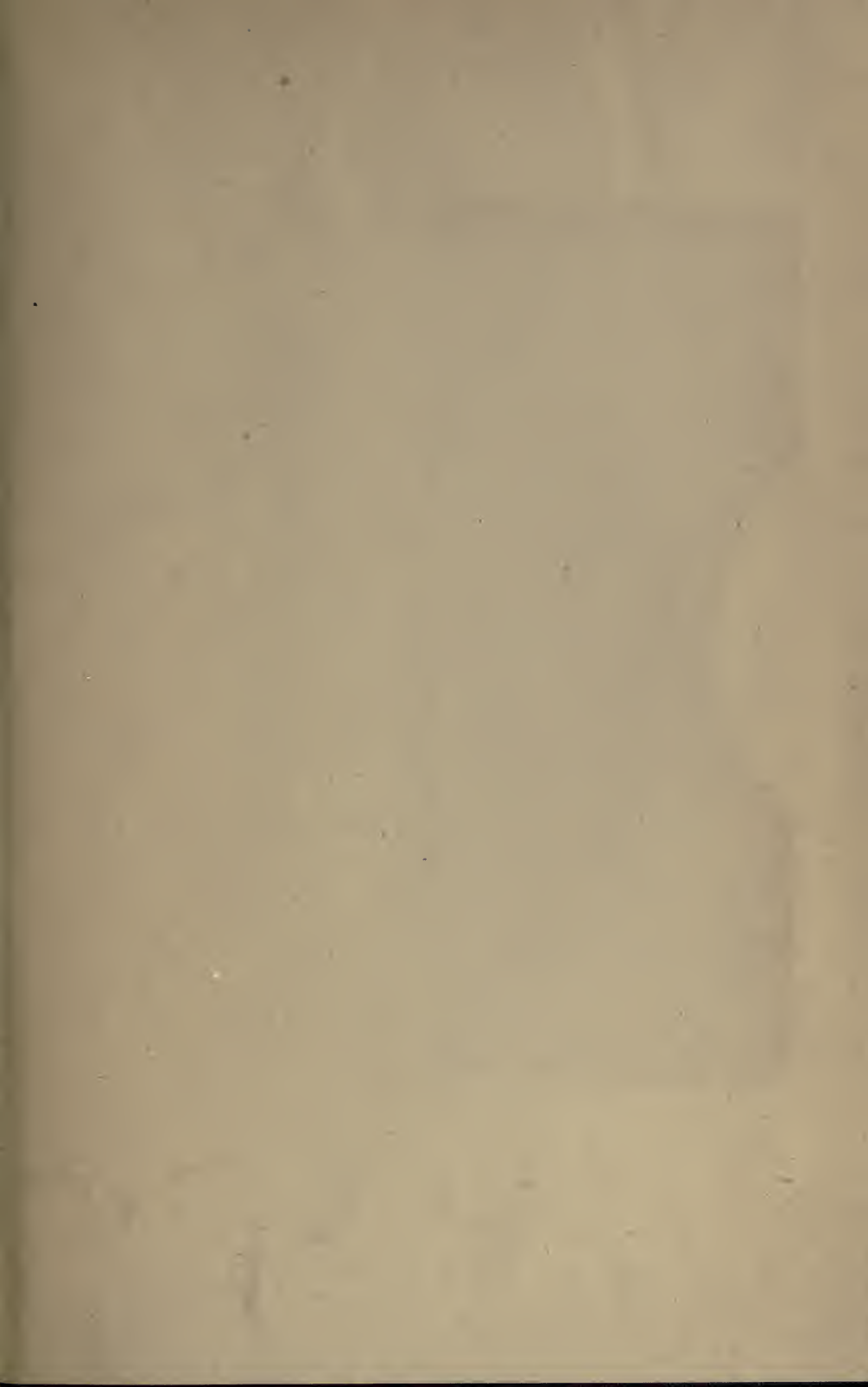
Such was the prison in which Abbot Feckenham was

destined to pass the last few years of his life. Even the rigours of his detention and the dismal surroundings of his prison-house were unable to extinguish his benevolent feelings for others. His last public work was the repair of the causeway over the fens and the erection of a market cross in the little town. He died in 1584, and on 16th of October he was buried in the churchyard of the parish of Wisbeach.

I have very little more to add. Stevens, the continuator of Dugdale, describes Abbot Feckenham as a man of "a mean stature, somewhat fat, round-faced, beautiful and of a pleasant aspect, affable and lively in conversation." Camden calls him "a man learned and good, who lived a long time and gained the affection of his adversaries by publicly deserving well of the poor." To the last he never forgot the poor of Westminster. In the overseer's accounts of the parish of St. Margaret's it is recorded in 1590: "Over and besides the sum of forty pounds given by John Fecknam, sometime abbot of Westminster, for a stock to buy wood for the poor of Westminster, and to sell two faggots for a penny, and seven billets for a penny, which sum of forty pounds doth remain in the hands of the churchwardens." He also left a bequest to the poor of his first monastic home of Evesham.

Such is a brief outline of a man, who in his day delighted in doing good to others. In spite of difficulties which would have crushed out the energies of most men he persevered in his benefactions. Amongst other places that benefitted by his love for the poor is this great city of Bath which may well revere his memory and inscribe his name upon the illustrious roll of its worthies.

F. A. GASQUET.



96686. HECCLEB.

F.

Feckenham

Author Gasquet, Francis Aidan

Title Abbot Feckenham and Bath.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
LIBRARY

Do not
remove
the card
from this
Pocket.

Acme Library Card Pocket
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File."
Made by LIBRARY BUREAU

